

Opening Statement of Keith Miller
Director of the Office of Overseas Schools
before
House Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security,
Emerging Threats and International
May 10, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's Soft Targets Program for overseas schools. I believe we have made progress in enhancing security at overseas schools attended by dependents of U.S. Government employees, as well as other U.S. citizen students. First, I will provide some background on the Office of Overseas Schools and our mission to enhance educational opportunities for U.S. students abroad, and then I will speak about the Soft Targets Program at overseas schools.

The Office of Overseas Schools

The mission of the Office of Overseas Schools is to ensure the best possible educational programs for U. S. Government dependents enrolled in elementary and secondary schools overseas. Our office has a budget of \$8.5 million and a professional staff of a director and six Regional Education Officers. Our office provides grant and technical assistance to 191 elementary and secondary schools in 132 countries. These are independent, non-profit schools that offer a core American curriculum to children of many nationalities. Enrollment in these schools totals 103,000, of whom 28,000 are U.S. citizens. About 60% of the U.S employee dependent students, as well as many other U.S. citizen students, attend these schools.

Security in overseas schools has long been a concern of the Office of Overseas Schools:

- When the Regional Education Officers travel to posts and visit Department-assisted schools, they encourage school officials to update their security plans.
- The Regional Educational Officers consult with post Regional Security Officers, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's special agents in charge of embassy security, on these visits to encourage coordination with the assisted schools in reviewing security plans and

otherwise assisting the schools with security issues. Our experience shows that there is a solid relationship between Regional Security Officers and school officials.

- The Department sent cables to all overseas posts in 1998, 2001, and again in 2003 directing Regional Security Officers to collaborate with schools on security issues.
- In 1998, the Office of Overseas Schools published an Emergency Procedures Manual and sent it to all posts and Department-assisted schools. The manual provides a checklist of security items and procedures that schools can use to frame their local security or emergency plans.
- After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the manual was updated with the assistance of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and re-sent to all posts and Department-assisted schools. We again encouraged the posts to work with schools in updating their security plans.
- The Office of Overseas Schools has sponsored a security expert to address directors of Department-assisted schools at several regional association conferences of international schools around the world on matters of personal and school security.

The Overseas Schools / Soft Targets Program

In the Department's FY 2003 Appropriations Act, Congress provided funds to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) for security enhancement grants to overseas schools in which U.S. citizens are enrolled – commonly known as the Soft Targets Program. The Office of Overseas Schools was asked to participate on a Soft Targets Working Group chaired by OBO, which also includes the Bureau of Diplomatic Security.

Over the past two years the Office of Overseas Schools has sent security enhancement grants, totaling over \$27,000,000 in two phases to schools assisted by the Department of State. Phase I provided \$10,500,000 to 184 Department-assisted overseas schools for basic security enhancements: shatter resistant window film, public address systems, and radios for communication with U.S. Embassies and consulates. Phase II offered

\$17,000,000 for additional advanced security enhancements to 160 Department-assisted schools in accordance with their needs as determined by Regional Security Officers at posts, such as security walls, bollards, and gate systems.

Phases III and IV of the Soft Targets Program address security enhancement needs of overseas schools that are attended by U.S. government employee dependents, but do not have a pre-existing grant relationship with the Department. Phase III, currently under way, is providing the basic security upgrades. To date, \$8.1 million has been awarded to schools in Phase III. Phase IV, to be undertaken in FY 06, will provide advanced security upgrades.

The GAO report, "Overseas Security," says that the "full scope of the school program has not yet been determined." It is my understanding that this complex process is well under way.

The report further notes that "schools are not tied to post emergency plans." The Office of Overseas Schools encourages such involvement, and I understand that some schools are presently integrated into the post emergency plans and efforts are underway to bring the others into post emergency plans.

What more needs to be done to better secure overseas schools? The single best way to improve security in overseas schools is for Regional Security Officers to enhance their close contact with the school officials to advise on security measures and otherwise keep them fully informed about relevant security issues.